

Excerpts From a Speech by Gorbachev Before the Lithuanian Communists

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VILNIUS, U.S.S.R., Jan. 14 — Following are excerpts from an address by President Mikhail S. Gorbachev at a meeting with Communist Party dissidents in Lithuania on Saturday, as recorded and translated by Tass, the official Soviet press agency:

A Time of Baltic Euphoria

My stay in the republic and participation in this meeting, at which both wings of the Communist movement in Lithuania are present, indicates that you, comrades, have not yet got out of the state of euphoria and that it is still difficult to direct the process of the comprehension of what is happening in your republic into a deeper channel.

Nevertheless we still need to have a talk. Nothing should be lost.

Of course this visit of mine goes beyond the framework of a regular one and is of unconventional nature. The fact that a group of members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and representatives of other republics and cultural figures are present here only emphasizes the unconventionality of the situation.

Our stay in the republic and our talk here reflect deep concern, which has manifested itself within the party and its various segments and, in point of fact, throughout the country over the course of the development of the socio-political situation in Lithuania and over the decisions taken by the Lithuanian Communist Party's 20th Congress...

I must say that the Soviet Union and perestroika in our country is the central point of all changes that are now taking place in the world and in socialist countries and that promise that the entire human civilization will get out to a new stage. How the world will change will depend in many respects on how perestroika will proceed, and what results it will produce...

Lenin, Not Stalin

It should be said straight: our multi-ethnic state is now living through the most crucial and difficult period. The essence of it is in complete and final renunciation of the Stalinist model of federation, in which federal character was only declared while unitarianism was being implanted.

Nowadays we return to the Leninist idea of the nationalities question and to the premise

that gravitation towards integration, towards the combining of efforts in the economy, science and politics does not contradict but is also inseparably connected with the upsurge of national awareness and national self-affirmation.

These are not mutually exclusive processes and goals. On the contrary, they are organically compatible and coincide. Moreover, this is precisely how one should act. Otherwise the former and the latter would suffer damage....

As you know, the Second Congress of People's Deputies instructed the Supreme Soviet to urgently take up the business of distinguishing between the competence of the union and of the republics so that the sovereignty issue could be resolved at the constitutional level.

Thereby the issue which now gives rise to a lot of argument and leads to constitutional collisions and conflict situations will be decided. The point in question is to determine in which fields the union legislation will have priority and in which republican legislation will take precedence....

No Simple Answers

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union is true to the Leninist principle of the right of nations to self-determination. Right up to secession. This is a constitutional norm. It is recorded in the old Constitution. And, I am sure, will be listed in a new one as well. We do not intend to waive this major principle. This is very important to our multinational state.

I have already had an opportunity to speak at one of the meetings about the inadmissibility of simplified interpretation of this constitutional provision. It seemed to some that it is enough to have a show of hands to decide the matter.

This is understandable in an inexperienced man, but he who deals with history, politics and real life realizes that problems of this kind are not resolved in this way. Things are considerably more complicated....

It is necessary to study and sort things out to decide what is to be done. It is necessary, indeed, to come down from concepts, from rostrums, to life. These problems must be discussed with, for instance, a conciliatory commission, and the process should be conducted normally, democratically.

The problem of secession comprises deep economic, social, political-legal, defense-

strategic and international-geopolitical aspects. It is impossible to ignore the interests of the union, in which the interests of all republics are interrelated and do not exist in isolation....

Checking the Soviet Compass

It is necessary to weigh and think through everything a thousand times before one or another people sets out on an independent voyage. How can it be done without a compass, maps, a stock of fuel and a team....

Just let the people be. That's all. It is one thing if group who authored this concept goes drifting on an ice floe or a raft. Let them drift, we shall be able to rescue them one way or another. But you cannot do this to a people. Everything must be thought through and through quite thoroughly.

Yesterday I talked with farmers and workers. They are much more substantial philosophers than we are. What common sense they have, and, you know, when we tell them everything, tell them how things work out and what should be done to alter everything, then people will certainly think again.

In brief, the Soviet Communist Party favors a federation. Because the federation enables the use of a shorter way to reach the same goals. For as regards goals, we and you do not differ....

How Binding Are the Ties?

As far as I know, the majority of the leadership both in the party and in the Supreme Soviet adhere to this, so it will be this way. And then there will be political sovereignty and economic independence, not mentioning the spiritual sphere, culture and the language....

Inter-republican ties in our country are even closer than on the European market. And now Europe is going to unite in a confederation or federation.

Many politicians speak about it. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing told me, "Mr. President, prepare to deal with a federation of Western Europe." There are already signs of that state.

It is politics that follows economics and not vice versa. The need to orient oneself to the end results, to cooperate on an equal basis and to work more effectively brings about the need for a political superstructure that would serve these basic interests better.

I should say that all kinds of suspicions and

political doubts concerning the federation have no real grounds. So I'll repeat: We all, including me, criticize the past experience and we are unanimous in our assessments and conclusions.

But we differ in principle in the following: We say it is necessary to transform and renew the federation and reveal its entire potential, and you go as far as to call for a withdrawal from the federation. Here our differences begin.

'More Catholic Than the Pope'

I don't think this is the best way. Although I said that the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party and I personally cannot find ourselves in a situation when, so to say, I would be more Catholic than the Pope or more Lithuanian than you, I seem to care about the fate of the Lithuanian people more than you and to pretend that you care less about it.

After all, tackle your problems yourselves and lay your arguments on the federal round table. In this connection we should accelerate the drafting and passing of a law on the mechanism of the withdrawal of a constituent republic from the Soviet Union and of its self-determination.

There must be such a mechanism. If there is such a right, then there must be a mechanism of its implementation. I promise it will be developed, although I remain on my firm position: We need the federation. It is the second wind of socialism....

Society now needs accord between people of all nationalities as never before. So let us seek such accord. I think the main condition for a sound, full-fledged life and development of our union, of the common home of Soviet nationalities and ethnic groups is this accord rather than the union's disintegration on ethnic grounds....

Yes, Change Will Come

In short, comrades, we are on the threshold of big changes in the operation of the party, in its structure, in its entire activity and status in society. And I shall say this: It is a bad thing that some comrades fail to feel it, do not see it, if they hurry to isolate themselves and look for freedom in a closed national space. This is no freedom.

The Soviet Communist Party will deliberate, work at its plenums and congresses, de-

cide on union affairs, political questions, how perestroika should be developed, and meanwhile Comrade Brazauskas will be reading newspapers to learn what we have decided and what the fate of Lithuania should be in this connection....

And what is then the party for? Or do you want to bury it here at first and then spread the experience further? Then go ahead and say so. We shall not be able to do without the party. Moreover, we already see new parties appearing here. We shall not be able to do without. Parties exist and will exist the world over, in any society.

Verbiage Isn't Democracy

True, one hears people say that a multiparty system will save all. But you know, when I look at it, I see some people simply trying to get more portfolios through a multiparty system, through creating new institutions.

It's all right. They think, "We shall explain things to the people and squeeze everything within a framework." The main thing is to have more portfolios and then compete against each other. But what we do need is to get away from these portfolios, to make them fewer. Lots of portfolios and verbiage are not yet democracy.

We know dozens of states with 10 to 20 parties, but ruled by dictatorial regimes. And not all have been freed from them. Everything is determined, comrades, by the regime of political power, the level of democracy, the political process, the functioning of structures, public opinion, public movements that are capable of accumulating and expressing and making known public interests....

Nothing 'Tragic' in Pluralism

All should be determined by the political process. I do not see anything tragic about a multiparty system if it emerges and meets the realistic interests of society.

Incidentally, after the October Revolution, the Government and an all-Russia Central Executive Committee were formed on a multiparty basis. So one should not dread a multiparty system. Neither should one artificially impose it. This is the first thing.

Second, a multiparty system is not a cure-all. Democracy and openness are the main things, just as realistic participation and involvement of the people in all political and social processes and institutions.